A ‘Learning by Doing’ Approach to Building Evaluative Capacity

- The experiences of six South Asian NGOs in developing a robust, learning-oriented, yet value driven monitoring system for the “Tsunami project”

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August 2008

Executive Summary

Background

The *Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami Affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka* project, otherwise known as the "Tsunami Project," is a three year initiative that aims to strengthen the resilience of coastal villages to natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis. This multi-partner project, which began in 2006, is co-funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and IDRC is also involved in the project as the executive agency on behalf of CIDA. The project is being implemented by six partner organizations in 16 villages in two states (Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu) in India — and in 12 villages in four districts (Galle, Matara, Hambantota and Ampara) in Sri Lanka. This project aims to develop and test innovative tools to link ecological rehabilitation and coastal shelterbelt forests to improved local livelihoods, in part through village-level access to strategic information. The results of the project will demonstrate how new technologies and local institutions can reduce the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters in coastal communities.

Early in the project it became evident to IDRC staff that the local partners had limited experience working with formal monitoring systems. As a result, a "learning by doing" approach to developing and implementing a monitoring system for the Tsunami project evolved in consultation with the local NGOs, IDRC and CIDA. A "learning by doing" approach was chosen largely out of necessity; IDRC and the partners wanted to benefit from using a learning-oriented monitoring system, which would require that the partners fully participate in the system's development and implementation.

A log frame (LFA) was developed at the project's inception and is being used to guide its implementation. It was also decided to integrate Outcome Mapping (OM) into the project's overall evaluation system as a result of the positive experience of a few of the NGO staff members' participation in an OM workshop in March 2005. The project is thus using both OM and the LFA.

Capacities in M&E are thus viewed by the donor and implementing agencies as an important contribution to the success of the Tsunami project, both for improving project activities and for demonstrating results to funding agencies. As such, the project has the intention of strengthening project-level skills and techniques in M&E; a set of activities that is generally referred to in the literature as "evaluation capacity building" (ECB).

To support the "learning by doing" approach to developing and managing the monitoring system, technical support (i.e. ECB activities) has been provided to the implementing NGOs throughout the project. IDRC has contracted an M&E consultant from the Association for Stimulating Know How (ASK India) to give ongoing "hands-on" support for the project partners. As of May 2008, the consultant had conducted two workshops that involved all of the partner NGOs, three workshops for the Indian partners and three workshops for the Sri Lankan partners. The aim of these workshops has been to develop

the monitoring system in a participatory manner and to train the partners in M&E methods and other related skills such as facilitation.

As a result of the NGOs' decision to incorporate OM in the monitoring system, IDRC organized a three-day OM workshop in Colombo Sri Lanka in March 2007. All of the partner NGOs attended the workshop. The M&E consultant from ASK India also attended, as OM was a new methodology for him despite of his vast knowledge and experience with M&E. Following the workshop, one of the presenters – Terry Smutylo – also gave specific feedback to the NGOs on their OM related plans.

IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU), specifically the Senior Program Officer at IDRC's SARO office, has also been providing M&E technical support, and the Tsunami Project Research Officer has attended the majority of the monitoring workshops and given her support as needed. As of May 2008, the monitoring systems for both the Indian and Sri Lankan components of the project had been developed, the monitoring tools have been tested and monitoring data was being collected. The project's official end date is March 2009.

Purpose of the case study on the Tsunami Project

The purpose of this document is to help the project partners - the partnering NGOs, consultants, IDRC and CIDA - to recognize and think more clearly about how using a "learning by doing" approach to developing and implementing a monitoring system for the Tsunami project has played a role in changing organizational practices in M&E of the six partnering NGOs. As a mid-project document, this paper reflects on what the partners are learning, as viewed from the latter stages of implementing this three year project.

This report finds that the appreciation and openness among the Tsunami project partners (IDRC, CIDA, ASK India and the local NGOs) to both the successes and challenges associated with a "learning by doing" approach has created a learning-oriented project environment in which the NGO partners have been able to develop their capacities in M&E by working through difficulties and embracing opportunities.

Major Findings

This case study provides a rich description of the donor and implementing partners' experiences with the ECB and monitoring activities associated with the Tsunami project. The following summarizes the lessons learned from the various aspects of the ECB and monitoring activities.

- *The implementing partners' unique organizational capacities and roles within the Tsunami project has created an opportunity for them to work with and help each other, which has proved to positively complement the formal ECB activities.* The partners have been helping and learning from each other, which has been instrumental for a project that involves partners with different levels of capacities and different capacity needs depending on their role in the Tsunami project.

- *Although there were mechanisms built in the project to share the partners' experiences related to a variety of technical areas, specific mechanisms to share experience in M&E would have also been beneficial.* Although there were monitoring workshops that all the partners attended, it would have been beneficial to dedicate part of a workshop for the partners to share their experiences in monitoring other projects or programs. This type of exchange was done for other aspects of the project and seemed quite beneficial. This type of communication would not only have helped improve the specific monitoring activities of the Tsunami project, but would have also helped IDRC to gain a greater understanding of the partners' experiences with monitoring techniques.

- *As the Evaluation Champion for the Tsunami project, the M&E consultant has been integral for providing motivation, support and encouragement.* According to King and Volkov, "The value of evaluation champions is hard to overestimate. Although leadership is critical, so too are the activities of people who champion the evaluation cause (King and Volkov, 2005; p.13)". There is little doubt that the M&E consultant has played the role of the Evaluation Champion – his vast experience, knowledge and enthusiasm for M&E, and development practice in general, provided a significant boost to the learning-orientation of the Tsunami project.

- *There seems to have been some confusion between project-level capacities and organizational-level capacities.* The objective of the ECB activities for the Tsunami project was to build project-level capacities (i.e. to improve the Tsunami project), not organizational capacities. Strengthening organizational capacities would definitely be viewed as a positive outcome, but was nonetheless not the objective of the ECB activities. A purposeful ECB plan would have helped to target project-level capacities by basing the ECB objectives and activities on the specific needs for monitoring the Tsunami project. For example, a purposeful ECB plan could have helped to recognize how OM could have been introduced to the monitoring system, and what resources were needed, so that the methodology would have been more useful to monitoring the Tsunami project, thus contributing to project-level capacities.

- *Developing ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners has been a challenge.* However, there have been a number of mechanisms that have helped to strengthen ownership.

  (1) Developing (as much as possible) a system that reflects the implementing partners' organizational values. For example, re-developing the LFA in participatory manner and the use of OM seemed to help develop greater ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners. However, whether ownership has been achieved with the Tsunami project is still debatable. The monitoring work for the Tsunami project has been driven by the donor agencies – CIDA requiring

the use of the LFA and IDRC pushing for the use of a learning-oriented monitoring system. CIDA's requirement for use of the LFA has no doubt placed restrictions on the partners' control over the monitoring system. The LFA methodology, as with all evaluation methodologies, comes with it a certain set of values, principles and ways of viewing the world. Allowing the partners to choose their own monitoring methodology, which could very well be the LFA, that fits within their organizational and personal philosophies and also that addresses their needs in terms of how they value monitoring work, may have helped to increase ownership of the monitoring system for the Tsunami project.

(2) IDRC's and the M&E consultant's focus on a learning-oriented monitoring system. The learning-orientation emphasized by IDRC and the M&E consultant towards the monitoring and ECB activities has been well received by the partners, which has helped the partners to value and thus develop ownership over the M&E system.

- *Linking clear ECB goals, objectives and activities to specific project-based timelines may have helped to better manage the relationship between manageability and robustness of the monitoring system.* The Tsunami project has had difficulties with timelines in terms of the monitoring work, and this can partially be attributed to the time that has been required for the ECB activities to come to fruition. A purposeful ECB plan, attached to specific project-based timelines, could have helped to outline what was needed to achieve the monitoring goals, how the ECB activities would contribute to this, and from what schedule this would be achieved. A more detailed ECB plan, linked directly to project-based goals and timelines, would have helped to ensure that the ECB objectives and activities were based on the needs for monitoring the Tsunami project and thus focused on project improvement. Flexibility is important and should remain a priority, but nonetheless, developing a purposeful ECB plan would help to establish clear project-based objectives, goals and timelines for the ECB activities, and as a result, help to ensure a robust, yet manageable monitoring system.

- *Incorporating specific learning objectives on M&E in a conflict environment may have helped the project partners in Sri Lanka to better monitor the project activities in the east of the country*. There is a significant amount of literature and best practices on conducting M&E in a conflict setting. It would have been useful to include these lessons in the ECB activities.

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1.0 Introduction

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is currently in the third year of coordinating and managing a three year IDRC and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) co-invested project, *Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka.* The "Tsunami Project" is being implemented in partnership with two local NGOs in Sri Lanka – Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya) and Practical Action (P.A.),[1] and four NGOs in India – M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), in partnership with three grassroots NGOs: People's Action for Development (PAD), the Society for Participatory Research and Integrated Training (SPRIT), and Praja Pragathi Seva Sangam (PPSS).[2]

Early in the project it became evident to IDRC staff that the local partners had limited experience working with formal monitoring systems. As a result, a "learning by doing" approach to developing and implementing a monitoring system for the Tsunami project evolved in consultation with the local NGOs, IDRC and CIDA. A "learning by doing" approach was chosen largely out of necessity; IDRC and the partners wanted to benefit from using a learning-oriented monitoring system, which would require that the partners fully participate in the system's development and implementation.

A log frame was developed at the project's inception and is being used to guide its implementation. It was also decided to integrate Outcome Mapping (OM)[3] into the project's overall evaluation system as a result of the positive experience of a few of the NGO staff members' participation in an OM workshop in March 2005. The project is thus using both OM and the LFA.

This paper explores how using a "learning by doing" approach to developing a robust, learning-oriented, yet value driven monitoring system for the Tsunami project is playing a role in changing organizational practices in M&E among the partner NGOs. As a mid-project document, this paper reflects on what the partners are learning, as viewed from the latter stages of implementing this three year project.

[1] Sarvodaya is IDRC's direct partners. Sarvodaya works with P.A. to implement the project activities.
[2] MSSRF is IDRC's direct partner. MSSRF works with SPRIT, PPSS and PAD to implement the project activities.
[3] Developed by IDRC in 2001, Outcome Mapping (OM) is a methodology for planning and assessing development programming that is oriented towards change and social transformation. OM provides a set of tools to design and gather information on the outcomes, defined as behavioural changes, of the change process. OM helps a project or program learn about its influence on the progression of change in their direct partners, and therefore helps those in the assessment process think more systematically and pragmatically about what they are doing and to adaptively manage variations in strategies to bring about desired outcomes. OM puts people and learning at the centre of development and accepts unanticipated changes as potential for innovation. To learn more about OM please see IDRC's Evaluation Unit's website at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html; or the Outcome Mapping Learning Community's website at http://www.outcomemapping.ca/.

There are seven further sections to this paper: section two outlines the research methodology; section three introduces the Tsunami project; section four briefly reviews the literature on evaluation capacity building and describes the framework used to conduct this research; section five discusses some of the challenges and opportunities associated with the "learning by doing" approach; section six looks at the process of developing ownership, a monitoring system that reflects organizational values, and the focus on a utilization/learning-oriented monitoring system; section seven explores the challenges and trade-offs associated with trying to develop a manageable yet robust monitoring system; and finally, section eight provides some lessons learned.

2.0 Research Methodology

The purpose of this document is to help the project partners - the partnering NGOs, consultants, IDRC and CIDA - to recognize and think more clearly about how using a "learning by doing" approach to developing and implementing a monitoring system for the Tsunami project has played a role in changing organizational practices in M&E of the six partnering NGOs. This study has consisted of four major research components:

1. A review of the literature on evaluation capacity building (ECB) and the theoretical foundations of Outcome Mapping (OM) and the Log Frame Approach (LFA), including discussions on integrating the two approaches.

2. An in-depth file review of Tsunami Project documents that relate to the monitoring or ECB activities.

3. A review of IDRC documents on projects that have used both OM and the LFA;

4. Key informant interviews with relevant IDRC program staff, Evaluation Unit staff, project consultants and representatives of the implementing NGOs. In addition, the research conducted several strategic interviews with the aim of developing a broader conceptualization of the research themes.

5. Process observation during site visits in April/May to see how the monitoring component of the project is being implemented and to provide technical assistance where appropriate. The researcher participated in the fourth monitoring workshop in Machilipatunm, Andhra Pradesh from April 7 to 10, 2008. The researcher had planned to also attend the third monitoring workshop in Sri Lanka, but was unable to because of unforeseen circumstances. Interviews with the Sri Lankan partners were conducted from Ottawa, Canada to make up for this missed opportunity for data collection.

3.0 Background

Despite the magnitude and extent of impact from the December 2004 tsunami in South Asia,[4] it has been reported that loss of lives and properties behind mangrove wetlands and other thick coastal vegetation was reduced by these natural bio-shields or bio-barriers. Communications systems and information on coastal hazards also mitigated the impact of the tsunami: in those few villages where warnings were provided by telephone or a public address system linked to international information sources, loss of life was avoided (e.g. Nallavadu village, Pondicherry). While the December 2004 tsunami event was extremely rare, these coastal areas are subject to regular hazards from storms, floods and other natural disasters. Experience has shown that the resilience of the poor to natural disasters in coastal communities increases as livelihoods are made more secure and diverse.[5]

The *Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami Affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka* project, otherwise known as the "Tsunami Project," is a three year initiative that aims to strengthen the resilience of coastal villages to natural disasters such as cyclones and tsunamis.[6] This multi-partner project, which began in 2006, is co-funded by CIDA and IDRC, and IDRC is also involved in the project as the executive agency on behalf of CIDA. The project is being implemented by six partner organizations in 16 villages in two states (Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu) in India — and in 12 villages in four districts (Galle, Matara, Hambantota and Ampara) in Sri Lanka.[7] This project aims to develop and test innovative tools to link ecological rehabilitation and coastal shelterbelt forests to improved local livelihoods, in part through village-level access to strategic information. The results of the project will demonstrate how new technologies and local institutions can reduce the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters in coastal communities.

There are four key dimensions to developing coastal community resilience that are addressed in this project: (1) bioshield and natural resource management, (2) timely access to information and communications, (3) livelihood strengthening, and (4) building strong local governance for disaster preparedness and management. In addition, the partners agreed that they will collaborate to develop strategies for determining and addressing the sources of gender inequality in the project, such as recruiting a gender

[4] On December 26th, 2004, India and Sri Lanka experienced one of their worst natural disasters. An earthquake of magnitude 9.0 struck Indonesia off the West Coast of Northern Sumatra followed three hours later by another earthquake 81 km west of Pulo Kunji, Great Nicobar. These two earthquakes triggered giant tidal waves, which hit 2260 km of Indian coastline on the Southeast coast and more than 1000 km of Sri Lanka along its North, East and Southern coasts, causing massive amounts of damage. Estimates suggest that more than 31,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka and approximately 11,000 people were killed in India. More than two million people were affected by this disaster in the two countries, with the number of displaced at approximately 1 million (Fritz Institute, 2005).

[5] Tyler, Steven, "Joint Proposal to IDRC and CIDA"

[6] Please see Appendix #2 for a timeline of the project activities.

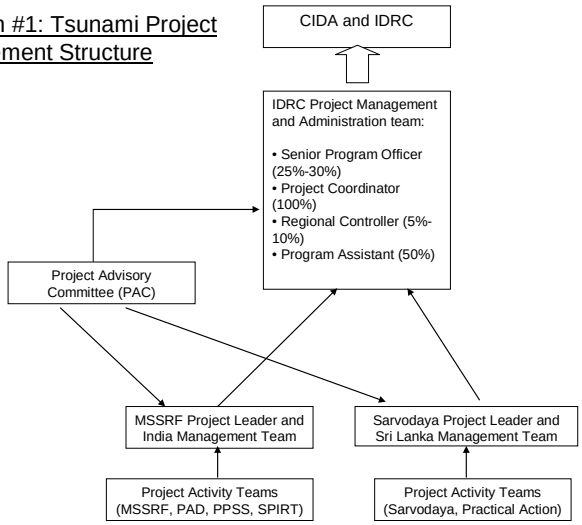
[7] Please see Appendix #3 and #4 for detailed maps of the project sites.

balanced project staff or conducting gender analysis to better understand gender-differentiated outcomes of the project interventions.[8]

The context of the Tsunami project is relatively complex. The Tsunami project is being implemented in a post-disaster situation (i.e. post tsunami) and in Sri Lanka the project is operating within a conflict environment, which has had a particular impact on the project activities in the east of the country. The effects of this "complex-emergency" setting are discussed further in Section 5.4. This project is also multi-site, with implementation activities at the village and district levels in both India and Sri Lanka. It is also a multi-language project at both the country and village level. The complexities associated with geography and language are discussed further in Section 5.1.

The Tsunami Project is managed collaboratively; however, IDRC, as a donor and executing agency, takes the overall administrative responsibility, including reporting to CIDA (see Diagram #1 below). IDRC hired a full-time project coordinator (Tsunami Project Research Officer) who began her duties in July, 2006. This person is located at the IDRC South Asia Regional Office (SARO) in New Delhi, which is the office responsible for the financial administration of the project. The project coordinator provides administrative oversight as well as coordination support for the project. A Senior Program Officer, based at IDRC SARO, assumes the overall management responsibility of the project. The Regional Controller at SARO also provides support for financial administration and reporting on the project and the Program Assistant provides administrative support.

Diagram #1: Tsunami Project Management Structure



The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) provides overall guidance on issues related to strategic management and direction of the project. The membership of the Committee was negotiated and agreed upon by both the implementing and funding organizations.[9]

[8] Tyler, Steven, "Joint Proposal to IDRC and CIDA"

The practical leadership for the project, particularly for implementation of activities at the field level, comes from MSSRF in India and Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka. MSSRF is partnering with three grassroots NGOs that manage the project at the field level: SPRIT, PAD, and PPSS. Sarvodaya is partnering with P.A., which is responsible for implementing the project activities in two villages in Sri Lanka. In terms of reporting, IDRC coordinates all the reporting requirements to CIDA, but relies on technical and financial reports submitted by the Sri Lankan and Indian partners.

From the beginning, monitoring has formed an integral component of the Tsunami project, used as a tool for both improving project activities and for demonstrating results to funding agencies. A log frame was developed at the project's inception and is being used to guide its implementation. It was also decided to integrate Outcome Mapping (OM) into the project's overall evaluation system as a result of the positive experience of a few of the NGO staff members' participation in an OM workshop in March 2005. The project is thus using both OM and the LFA. It is also expected that the project will carry out both a mid-term evaluation, conducted either by the NGOs themselves or an independent consultant (this has not yet been decided), and a final evaluation, which will be conducted by an independent consultant.

To support the "learning by doing" approach to developing and managing the monitoring system, technical support has been provided throughout the project. IDRC has contracted an M&E consultant from the Association for Stimulating Know How (ASK India) to give ongoing "hands-on" support for the project partners. As of May 2008, the consultant had conducted two workshops that involved all of the partner NGOs, three workshops for the Indian partners and three workshops for the Sri Lankan partners. The aim of these workshops has been to develop the monitoring system in a participatory manner and to train the partners in M&E methods and other related skills such as facilitation.

As a result of the NGOs' decision to incorporate OM in the monitoring system, IDRC organized a three-day OM workshop in Colombo Sri Lanka in March 2007. All of the partner NGOs attended the workshop. The M&E consultant from ASK India also attended, as OM was a new methodology for him despite of his vast knowledge and experience with M&E. Following the workshop, one of the presenters – Terry Smutylo – also gave specific feedback to the NGOs on their OM related plans.

IDRC's Evaluation Unit (EU), specifically the Senior Program Officer at IDRC's SARO office, has also been providing M&E technical support, and the Tsunami Project Research Officer has attended the majority of the monitoring workshops and given her support as needed. As of May 2008, the monitoring systems for both the Indian and Sri Lankan components of the project had been developed, the monitoring tools have been tested and monitoring data was being collected. The project's official end date is March 2009.

[9] Please see Appendix #5 for the PAC's Terms of Reference.

The purpose of this document is to help the project partners - the partnering NGOs, consultants, IDRC and CIDA - to recognize and think more clearly about how using a “learning by doing” approach to developing and implementing a monitoring system for the Tsunami project has played a role in changing organizational practices in M&E of the six partnering NGOs. It is the opinion of this report that the appreciation and openness among the Tsunami project partners (IDRC, CIDA, ASK India and the local NGOs) to both the successes and challenges associated with a "learning by doing" approach has created a learning-oriented project environment in which the NGO partners have been able to develop their capacities in M&E by working through difficulties and embracing opportunities.

4.0 What is Evaluation Capacity Building?

According to Anne Bernard (2005),

> "In the context of IDRC, capacity refers generally to the ability of individuals, communities and institutions to generate, use and promote knowledge in ways which support equitable and sustainable development. Capacity development concerns the intention to create and/or strengthen such abilities (Bernard, 2005; p.2)."[10]

Capacities in M&E are viewed by the donor and implementing agencies as an important contribution to the success of the Tsunami project, both for improving project activities and for demonstrating results to funding agencies. As such, the project has the intention of strengthening project-level skills and techniques in M&E; a set of activities that is generally referred to in the literature as "evaluation capacity building" (ECB).

ECB is not a new form of development assistance; UNDP and USAID, for example, have been conducting ECB activities since the 1960s (Schaumburg-Müller, 1996). Nonetheless, as a result of the new public service management paradigm – based largely on the pressures for demonstrating accountability of public funds – that swept through developed countries throughout the 1980s and 90s, ECB has become an increasingly important form of both development assistance and domestic public investment.

Despite the history of ECB in the development assistance field, in the evaluation literature ECB is described as an "emergent field of practice, with an emergent overall process, actual practices, occupational orientation, and practitioner roles that form the ECB structural elements" (Stockdill et al., 2002c; p. 113). The American Evaluation Association, in fact, only began to discuss ECB as a formal concept at its 2000 presidential address. There was other writing on ECB before this –often termed differently than ECB or Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) – but the literature has been rather sparse.

In the spring of 2002, the American Evaluation Association journal, *New Direction for Evaluation*, set out to provide a first mapping of ECB as a process and practice (Stockdill et al., 2002b). From this, a conceptual definition for ECB was elaborated as:

> "… a context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality program evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices

[10] There is much discussion on and tension surrounding the terms "capacity building" and "capacity development," some preferring "capacity development" as it more recognizes that capacities are strengthened (i.e. recognizing initial capacities) rather than built from nothing. The reason the term "capacity building" was used for this paper is because the term "evaluation capacity building" is the most accepted term used in the evaluation literature.

within and/or between one or more organizations/programs/sites (Stockdill et al., 2002b; p.109)."

Although there are many other definitions of ECB (Schaumburg-Muller, 1996; Bamberger, 2000), for the purposes of this report the above definition will be used as a point of reference.[11]

Building evaluative capacity in the NGO sector

It is important to distinguish between ECB in the NGO sector and ECB in the public sector, as they involve different sets of principles, approaches, tools and methods (Stockdill et al., 2002b). For example, government bureaucracies are often much larger and more complex than NGOs, thus making evaluation much more difficult to integrate into decision making processes. ECB efforts in the public sector, therefore, often focus on reforming systems, structures and institutions. On the other hand, NGOs are more likely to lack appropriate resources, such as M&E training, equipment or M&E budgets. ECB activities with NGOs thus often focus on training in practical hands-on skills, such as data collection and analysis or facilitation.

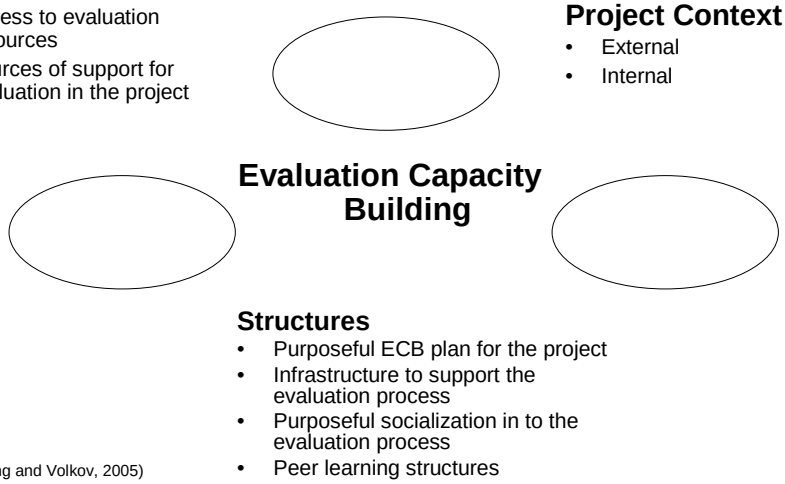
But equally important, NGOs and governments play different roles within the M&E context, and these roles often interact with one another. Governments most often play the role of the donor agency, are usually the sponsors of evaluation, and thus largely control the evaluation agenda. NGOs on the other hand rarely control the agenda and are more often the subject of evaluations (i.e. their performance is being examined). Thus, there is not only a dichotomy of differences between ECB approaches for the government and NGO sectors, but relationships between the two sectors that also influence ECB approaches and activities.

The focus of this study is ECB in the NGO sector, as the purpose of the "learning by doing" approach is to strengthen the evaluation capacity of the six local NGOs that are responsible for implementing the Tsunami project. An improvement in the partners' skills in M&E, it is hoped, will help to strengthen the learning-orientation of the Tsunami Project. Using M&E, the partners will know more about what has been successful, where improvement can be made, and be better able to demonstrate results to the funding agencies.

The framework used for this study, as depicted in Diagram #2 below, is based on a model developed by Jean A. King and Boris Volkov (2005). This model outlines the important components of a successful ECB strategy. These include resources – access to technical training and educational materials; structures – such as a strategic plan for the ECB activities; and an understanding of both the internal and external context and how this interacts with the ECB activities. This framework was chosen because it is specific enough to allow a dissection of the ECB efforts of the Tsunami project and is intended for analysis of ECB activities of NGOs.

[11] For a more detailed review of the ECB literature, please see Stockdill et al., 2002.

Diagram #2 - Framework for ECB



(adapted from King and Volkov, 2005)

5.0 A "Learning by Doing" approach to ECB

The "learning by doing" approach for the Tsunami project has created opportunities for the local partners to work through, and learn from, a variety of the challenges and opportunities associated with developing and implementing a project-level monitoring system. Before discussing some of these challenges and opportunities, however, it is first necessary to provide a brief understanding of what is meant by a "learning by doing" approach to ECB.

What is a "Learning by doing" Approach?

The concept of a "learning by doing" approach is very much related to the relationship between capacity building and learning. Anne Bernard (2005) describes this relationship well:

> "Capacity development and learning, while obviously related, are not the same things. The first is a more *instrumental concept*, capacities tending to be "for" something, specific sets of knowledge or skills needed by someone in order to get the job done, whether that job is doing research or living a better quality of life. Capacity development, therefore, implies someone deciding on his/her own, or for someone else, that a particular knowledge or skill is needed, and *intervening* in some way to enable its acquisition (Bernard, 2005; p.1)."

> "Learning, on the other hand, is something intrinsic, *a natural, internally-driven and personal process* of coming to understand, and to better manage, oneself in the social and physical environment. (Bernard, 2005; p.1)."

Capacity development is therefore more of a purposeful act directed for an intended use, whereas learning is much more of a personal and ongoing process that can't as easily be defined or structured. Preskill (2008) further elaborates stating that, "although there are many definitions of learning, most suggest that learning is inextricably linked to change – changes in thinking, changes in behaviour, and/or changes in beliefs" (Preskill, 2008; p.129).

Emphasizing the components of a "learning by doing" approach, Meadows, Randers, and Meadows (2005) describe this type of learning process:

> 'learning means the willingness to go slowly, to try things out, and to collect information about the effects of actions including the crucial but not always welcome information that the action is not working. One can't learn without making mistakes, telling the truth about them, and moving on. Learning means exploring a new path with vigour and courage, being open to other people's exploration or other paths, and being willing to switch paths if one is found that leads more directly to the goal (Preskill, 2008; p.130).'

The premise of linking learning to doing is further elaborated by Bernard (2005):

> "the more a learning activity is grounded in the reality of a learner, linking theory to practice and unknown to known, the more likely it is:
>
> - that accommodations and adaptations between existing and new conceptual frameworks and behaviour patterns will be made, and
> - that various components of the learning task will build incrementally on, and reinforce, each other: (Bernard, 2005; p.20)."

"Learning by doing" therefore also refers to linking theory as closely as possible to practice, and having a willingness to try, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes.

For the Tsunami project, the capacity to use M&E to improve the project's activities necessitates a certain set of skills, behaviours and knowledge among the implementing partners. The approach to learning these skills has been based on the premise that the NGOs can learn the appropriate M&E skills by working through the challenges of actually developing and implementing a monitoring system – with the support of M&E technical experts – and at the same time develop and manage a robust monitoring system.

The "learning by doing" approach to ECB, in the context of the Tsunami project, thus refers to: (1) the purposeful assessment that the partner NGOs require greater capacities in M&E in order to utilize monitoring methods for the Tsunami project, (2) an explicit goal of developing the NGOs' capacities in M&E as specifically related to the Tsunami project, and finally, (3) that by working through the challenges of developing and implementing a monitoring system – with the support of technical M&E experts – the NGOs would be able develop and apply their newly learned M&E skill sets in order to develop and manage a robust monitoring system.

5.1 The challenges and opportunities of working with multiple layers of partners

The multiple layers of partners involved in the Tsunami project – partners working in different regions and countries, implementing partners versus lead organizations, and partners with different levels of capacity in M&E – have created challenges for the ECB activities, particularly the monitoring workshops, but have also provided opportunities for the different organizations to help each other and work off each others' strengths. Each partner has required a different set of M&E skills depending on their role in the project, and different needs in terms of strengthening their M&E skills. At the same time, each partners' unique organizational capacities, and role within the Tsunami project has created an opportunity for them to work with and help each other.

There are six implementing partners. MSSRF is the lead agency in India and takes overall responsibility for implementing the project activities and for reporting to IDRC. MSSRF directly implements the project activities in one village in Andhra Pradesh and one village in Tamil Nadu, but works with three local NGOs – SPRIT, PAD, PPSS – to

implement the project activities in the other villages and districts. Sarvodaya is the lead organization in Sri Lanka and also implements the majority of the project activities, but partners with P.A. in implementing and reporting on the project activities in two villages.

As the lead implementing agencies for the Tsunami project, MSSRF and Sarvodaya require different M&E related skill sets, and also have different baseline capacity levels, compared to the other project partners. Both MSSRF and Sarvodaya are accountable for all project activities in each country and thus for all reporting requirements to IDRC (although Sarvodaya does share reporting responsibilities with P.A.). They are responsible for developing and managing the entire monitoring system, including ensuring that quality monitoring data is being collected at the village and district levels, proper analysis of the data, and ensuring that this analysis is feeding into decision making and reporting at the village, district and project levels.

This requires in-depth knowledge of the entire M&E process, from understanding the system as a whole, to the intricacies of collecting data at the village level, to understanding how the whole process leads to strategic decision making and reporting at the project level. They are responsible for managing the relationship between themselves and both IDRC and CIDA and with the numerous other partners involved in the Tsunami project including: other local NGOs, local governments, village members, etc. Both MSSRF and Sarvodaya therefore require a diverse range of skills from project management and project-level strategic planning and reporting, to field-based skills such as data collection and facilitation involving community members.

On the other hand, the partners that are involved only in implementing the project activities (PAD, SPRIT, PPSS, and to a lesser extent, P.A.) have a much more specific role. Although they do have a role in developing the monitoring system as a whole, as this process has been based on participatory principles and thus has involved all of the partners, they are primarily concerned with data collection, decision making and reporting at the village and district levels. They therefore require mostly field-level skills such as data collection, facilitation, data analysis, and decision making and reporting at the village level.

As one might imagine, the lead and implementing organizations also vary considerably in their levels of ability in M&E. Previous to the Tsunami project, all of the organizations used a variety of monitoring and evaluation techniques to improve on their projects and to test various models of development. For example, P.A. has their own specific method for monitoring project activities, whereas Sarvodaya often uses consultancies to conduct their evaluation work. Thus, it is important to emphasize that all of the organizations do have considerable experience in a variety of M&E techniques. However, these are mostly informal and not necessarily based on structured ongoing learning-oriented assessment in relation to results, using indicators, and involving different stakeholders. M&E is also not institutionalized within the organizations – M&E is conducted on a project-by-project basis and they don't have centralized human resources (i.e. M&E units) for M&E. Generally speaking, the assessment by IDRC staff was that the group, as a whole, had

limited experience with and human resources dedicated to (including evaluation units) formal monitoring systems that are based on measuring results.

MSSRF and Sarvodaya, however, are much bigger and more complex than the other organizations, and thus do have greater resources and needs for M&E as a result of being accountable for a larger budget and to a greater diversity of donors. Both MSSRF and Sarvodaya have specific staff who work solely on M&E activities (i.e. M&E technical advisors); however these staff work at the project level rather than at the corporate level. The other project partners do not have staff dedicated to working on M&E. Again because of their size and experience, Sarvodaya, MSSRF, and also P.A., also have more experience than the other organizations in social science research methods, which serve as strong foundations for M&E related work.

These differences between the lead and implementing organizations – the different skill sets they need, and their different levels of capacity – have created both challenges and opportunities. The challenges have been particularly evident with the Indian side of the project, simply because of the greater diversity of organizations and people involved.

Challenges

The M&E consultant who has been facilitating the ongoing workshops has acknowledged the challenges associated with developing capacities among such a diverse group (see sidebar). It has clearly been difficult to conduct workshops for participants who have very different learning needs and capacity levels. As discussed above, MSSRF has different learning needs and a higher level of capacity then the other implementing organizations in India. As a result of this higher capacity, and also their position as the lead organization, MSSRF staff have naturally taken the lead in the workshops and often the staff of the other NGOs have been much less vocal. This has been made further difficult by the fact that the workshops have been conducted in English (the common language among all the participants) and the staff of the smaller NGOs have demonstrated a lower level of comfort with discussing their opinions in English in front of the entire group. The workshop facilitator has used small group work to address this problem, and MSSRF staff have provided translation, which has helped to facilitate greater participation. Nonetheless, the lack of equal participation has made it difficult to assess the level of understanding amongst staff of the smaller organizations at the workshops and the gaps in their knowledge that need to be addressed. Most importantly, because the workshops have not been targeted to the capacity level of the grassroots organizations and because of MSSRF's natural dominance during the workshops and the language issues noted above, the staff of these organizations have not been able to take full advantage of the monitoring workshops by learning new skills and fully contributing to the development of the monitoring system.

> *The three layered system: IDRC, MSSRF and the three NGOS (Spirit, PAD, and PPSS) has created challenges in terms of building M&E capacity within the project. Simply the number of people involved creates challenges in developing capacity.*
>
> - M&E consultant (paraphrase)

The Sri Lankan workshops have had similar difficulties, but were more related to the fact that the participation of the senior staff of both Sarvodaya and P.A. was much greater than the more junior staff in both organizations. Following discussions between the workshop facilitator and the partners in regards to this challenge, it was decided that it is more important that the field staff focus on their field work, and that any changes in the monitoring system would be communicated to them by the project lead staff. As a result, the third workshop was only attended by five of selected project staff from Sarvodaya and P.A. All the partners felt that this approach worked well and that the workshop ran much more smoothly and efficiently. The project staff also felt very confident in their ability to communicate all necessary aspects of the workshop outcomes to the field staff.

The monitoring workshops, however, have not only been training exercises, but have also involved developing the monitoring system in a participatory manner, and thus it has been very critical that representatives from each of the partner organizations have attended each workshop.[12] In both India and Sri Lanka, all the organizations and most of the project staff have attended each of the workshops.[13] The large number of people involved and their different language abilities have posed a significant challenge for designing and running the workshops. Simultaneous translation was tried at the Sri Lankan workshops, but it was found not to work very well because of the amount of back and forth conversation. The Indian partners used local languages during group work and English and simultaneous translation during plenary sessions, which, as mentioned above, resulted in poor participation of the grassroots NGOs during the plenary sessions.

Now that the monitoring systems have been finalized with both the Indian and Sri Lankan partners, and recognizing the difficulties associated with having all of the staff attend each workshop, the M&E consultant has suggested that the final upcoming workshops only involve senior staff who can then communicate any changes to the field-level staff. It is hoped that by only having senior staff attend the workshops, the workshops will be easier in terms of language issues, but will also be more focused on the specific needs of the participants and be based on their level of capacity in M&E. The only danger is the possibility of loss of ownership among the field-level staff. It is thus crucial that senior staff ensure that they keep the field-level staff well informed of decisions around the monitoring system, and also that they provide some sort of semi-structured training that is specifically relevant to their capacity needs.

Similar to most projects, power dynamics between the project partners have also created some difficulties. Power dynamics have not only been related to respective roles within the project (i.e. between donor and implementing agencies), but as discussed above have also been related to language (i.e. greater abilities in English) and also capacities in social science research and M&E, in which IDRC, MSSRF and Sarvodaya staff are dominant.[14]

[12] It should be noted that a consultant had originally developed the LFA, but that the partner organizations revised it in a participatory manner. Please see Section 6.1 for more details on the development of the LFA.
[13] As discussed above, the Sri Lankan partners switched approaches after the 2nd workshop.
[14] There could also be other factors (for example, class, caste, etc.) that are simply beyond the reach of this research because of the researchers' "outsider" perspective.

Again, the M&E consultant approached this well by conducting a lot of group work during the workshops, which has minimized difficulties with language and has spread experience equally throughout the groups, but the effects of power relations have nonetheless been a challenge throughout the monitoring process, particularly in relation to ownership of the monitoring system. As will be discussed further in Section 6.0, the monitoring work for the Tsunami project has been driven by the donor agencies which has resulted in difficulties in terms of ownership of the process among the implementing partners.

Successes

The diversity of skills in the NGOs has also presented a number of opportunities for the monitoring processes. For example, the staff from MSSRF have been playing the role of supporting the grassroots NGOs in monitoring the project activities. MSSRF has been working with the local NGOs in each step of the development of the monitoring system, such as developing indicators and tools for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. When breaking into small groups during the monitoring workshops, one MSSRF staff would work with each of the other NGO groups. Similarly, when breaking into groups to conduct field tests of the monitoring tools, MSSRF staff would lead their group and play a training role.

In fact, MSSRF has actually named their partner NGOs as Boundary Partners[15] using the OM methodology. Working with the partners they have developed a set of Progress Markers that map out how the partners' capacities will be increased through the duration of the Tsunami project.[16] For example MSSRF would "love to see" their partners, "mobilizing funds to sustain and expand the present project programmes". Hinting towards monitoring, MSSRF would "like to see" their partners "carrying out internal reflections on the progress and report as per the terms." MSSRF is thus assuming a mentoring role with their relationship with their partner NGOs. However, it should be noted that there were no actual direct references to either monitoring or evaluation in the set of progress markers.

Although not necessarily directly related to M&E, the partner NGOs who are stronger in a specific area have also been helping other partners who have less experience. MSSRF has been helping the project partners in Sri Lanka – Sarvodaya and P.A. – in bio shield management and with Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs). Within Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya has been learning from P.A. in the area of livelihood development, whereas P.A. is learning from Sarvodaya skills in implementation.

For example, in July 2007 project staff from the Indian organizations visited a village called Barhamanawatta in the Galle District of Sri Lanka to get exposure to the Village Information Centre (VIC) established by Sarvodaya and the Disaster Early Warning

[15] According to the OM manual, "Boundary partners are those individuals, groups, or organizations with whom the program interacts directly and with whom the program can anticipate opportunities for influence (Earl, Carden, and Smutylo, 2001)

[16] Please see Appendix #5 for the set of Progress Markers.

System established by LIRNEasia. Further, an expert from MSSRF in establishing mangrove and on-mangrove bio-shield was requested by IDRC to provide inputs to the bio-shield programmes of Sri Lankan project partners Sarvodaya and P.A. These are just a few examples, as there have been many more.

There were also joint monitoring meetings – the OM workshop and the first monitoring workshop – in which all of the Indian and Sri Lankan partners participated. However, it is unclear if at these joint workshops time was given for the partners to share each others' experiences in monitoring, such as techniques they have used in the past, or more generally, lessons they have learned from monitoring other projects. Dedicating part of a workshop session to sharing these experiences might have proved beneficial, not only to help the partners in monitoring the Tsunami project, but also so that IDRC and the M&E consultant would have a better idea of how the partners have used monitoring in the past.

5.2 Learning through practice.

To support the "learning by doing" approach, the Tsunami project has incorporated a number of mechanisms to help facilitate the development of the monitoring system and also build the NGOs capacities in M&E related skills. This has mainly involved ongoing monitoring workshops[17] - there have been eight thus far where the NGOs have tested monitoring tools, practiced data analysis and facilitation techniques and learned new methodologies. The workshops have also been a forum for feedback and encouragement.

The fourth monitoring workshop held in India provides an interesting example. One of the purposes of the workshop was to test the qualitative monitoring tools that had been developed at the previous workshops, and also the Progress Markers associated with the OM methodology. The larger workshop team was broken down into three separate groups and each group was tasked with "testing" one of the monitoring tools in a village called Sorlagundi. The next day each group reported on the challenges and successes in implementing the monitoring tools, and the tools were adjusted accordingly. For example, it was decided that a few of the qualitative indicators were redundant for the tool that was used to assess the quality of the bio-shield and thus they were removed.

One area in which some of the teams demonstrated difficulty was in facilitating group exercises with the villagers. Facilitation, however, is also an area that the M&E consultant is quite strong in and therefore he was able to provide support and encouragement during the "testing" exercises, and also feedback once the teams reconvened. The consultant recognized, as a result of his participation in this "testing" exercise, that more training was required in relation to facilitating discussions on gender, concepts of community participation and process documentation, and he proposed that the next workshop include training on these aspects. Facilitation skills have also been viewed as important among the Sri Lankan partners. In fact, for one of the Sri Lankan project staff, learning facilitation skills has been one of the areas that has been most

[17] See Appendix #6 for a list of the workshops and there intended outcomes.

valuable (see sidebar). This experience – learning facilitation skills through the monitoring workshops – also demonstrates how learning monitoring-related skills leads to other learning dimension and provides an overall complement to programming.

> *What has been important for me is learning the little things, the practical skills such as good facilitation.*
>
> - Sri Lankan project staff (paraphrase)

The M&E consultant has also been learning through practice; not only learning through his work with the Tsunami project, but also by having to learn a new M&E methodology. Since the NGOs decided to use OM to complement the LFA, the consultant, not being familiar with OM before working on the Tsunami project, has also had to learn the intricacies of OM. He has done so by attending an OM workshop, but also through facilitating the use of OM for the Tsunami project. Being quite familiar with OM, IDRC's Evaluation Program Officer from the SARO office has helped the M&E consultant with this process by supporting the Tsunami projects' work on OM.

This sort of back and forth learning – trying, making mistakes, receiving feedback and then trying again – is, as was discussed in Section 3.0, invaluable. Learning processes are simply much stronger when theory is taught in close relation to practice, and the "learning by doing" monitoring workshops have integrated theory with practice as tightly as possible. The project partners do seem to be learning through this process. As one of the Sri Lankan partners noted in relation to the OM methodology – "OM was confusing at the beginning, but later on it became much easier".

5.3 "Learning by doing" takes time

For the partners of the Tsunami project, learning and implementing M&E has not been completely driven by project timelines, but has also been based on what the partners have been able to achieve. This flexibility has proven to be both a strength and a drawback, but might also be considered a necessity, as simply stated, learning takes time. An example of a learning process that has required flexibility has been how the partners have approached learning and implementing OM.

As mentioned earlier, the NGOs decided to integrate OM into the project's overall evaluation system as a result of the positive experience of a few of the NGO staff members' participation in an OM workshop in March 2005. This led to IDRC's SARO EU Evaluation Program Officer to organize an OM workshop for all the project partners in March 2007.

Using OM for the Tsunami project has been somewhat of a challenge for the partners as learning and implementing two different M&E methodologies at the same time has been quite demanding, especially considering the project timelines (see sidebar on next page). The result has been that the partners have simplified the implementation of OM to what they feel is manageable. This is a completely appropriate approach, as taking on too

much would have simply resulted in poor implementation, and is what in fact OM practitioners at IDRC and on the OM Learning Community recommend.

> *Doing both [OM and the LFA] has been challenging – both in terms of developing capacity in two methods and the extra burden of implementing two methods – we didn't know this. It would have been useful if OM was established earlier when implementation was lean – learning and implementing OM simply needed more time.*
>
> - IDRC staff (paraphrase)

As of May 2008, both the India and Sri Lankan teams had selected a few Boundary Partners and established Progress Markers, but had not yet begun to collect monitoring data. As described earlier, the Indian team is trying a unique approach to OM. MSSRF has named their partner NGOs as their Boundary Partners, and in consultation with them, has established a set of Progressive Markers. The Indian partners are implementing OM in a complementary manner to the LFA (i.e. they have not attempted to integrate the two approaches), whereas in Sri Lanka the partners have made some attempt to integrate OM with the LFA – mostly involving cutting down on the Progress Markers and including the Progress Markers in the LFA. While the partners have made progress at the planning stage of OM, they have not yet begun to develop a system for monitoring the Progress Markers.

In terms of the OM workshops, a couple of the partners mentioned that they would have liked to have received more training on the practical elements of OM, such as how to measure and monitor Progress Markers. One of the partners noted that, "this [monitoring Progress Markers] was done in a few quick slides and the key message was you can decide how you want to monitor – it's up to you." Noting this, an IDRC staff in a trip report stated,

> "…I would suggest that in future OM trainings more material be presented on monitoring progress markers including presenting sample monitoring data to trainees and going over specific examples of selecting the parameters of LMH [Low, Medium, High] (especially qualitative parameters)."

It has also been recognized by IDRC staff that the monitoring component of the Tsunami project began too late and that this has affected the implementation of OM. As one IDRC staff member noted in a Trip Report of one of the monitoring workshops:

> "An overall challenge is that the relatively short timeframe of the project and the slow start on M&E will limit how far the project will get in implementing the monitoring and evaluation system. However, though they will not be able to gather many rounds of results within the current timeframe they will develop the capacity to use RBM and OM from the planning, monitoring (and hopefully the evaluation) stage."

Despite these challenges, using OM does seem to have benefited the individuals and organizations involved in the Tsunami project. The partners have expressed the fact that

OM is well suited to their personal and organizational philosophies, and have also suggested that they will use OM in other projects. Particularly, all of the organizations very much value their relationship with the communities in which they work and understand that communication is key to this relationship. OM, some of the partners have suggested, is a tool that helps to structure and facilitate dialogue with the communities and thus is valuable for developing and maintaining the participation of community members in decision making processes. As will be discussed further in section 6.1, this link between methodology and personal/organizational philosophy has helped to build ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners.

However, the benefits of using OM for the Tsunami Project do seem to be limited as monitoring data on the Progress Markers have not yet been collected and there are only a few months left in the project. The ECB activities related to OM have therefore developed organizational-level capacities, but have been limited in terms of developing project-level capacity.

Another example of the fact that "learning takes time" was in implementing the monitoring system as a whole. The M&E consultant noted the following at the second monitoring workshop with the Indian partners:

> "It was realized that this (monitoring of qualitative results in a systematic manner) was a new area for most participants. […] There was a consensus that this approach of scaling up monitoring coverage in a graduated manner may be a better idea and it will also allow the participants to focus on implementing of the project which is at a crucial stage and phasing in the monitoring step by step at a time and pace that will be more comfortable and not very overwhelming."

The "learning by doing" approach has required patience and understanding, and all the Tsunami project partners have understood this reality and approached the monitoring component of the Tsunami project as a learning exercise. This learning approach has, fortunately, not had a significant impact on grant performance management (i.e. the implementing partners reporting to IDRC and then from IDRC to CIDA). Although some of the reports from the implementing partners have been delayed, the semi-annual reports to CIDA from IDRC have been on time, of high quality and deemed adequate by CIDA.

5.4 A post-tsunami environment and the conflict in Sri Lanka

The Tsunami project has been, and continues to be, implemented in the context of what can be referred to as a "complex emergency". According to Hallam (1998),

> "The term 'complex emergency' was coined in Mozambique in the late 1980s as a way for aid agencies to acknowledge that humanitarian assistance needs were being generated by armed conflict as well as by periodic 'natural disaster' events, such as cyclones and droughts, while avoiding the use of terms such as 'civil war'

> and 'conflict' which were sensitive terms in the Mozambican context at the time (Hallam, 1998; p.21)."

Further,

> "While some consider the use of the term 'complex emergency' unhelpful, as it implies that some disasters are not 'complex', the term is useful in that it highlights the fact that situations involving political instability and armed conflict do make a difference to the way in which humanitarian problems can be tackled. These differences, in turn, have implications for the evaluation processes (Hallam, 1998; p.21)."

There are two factors that have contributed to a complex emergency setting for the Tsunami Project: the post-tsunami environment in both India and Sri Lanka and the ongoing civil conflict in Sri Lanka.

Post-tsunami environment in India and Sri Lanka

On December 26th, 2004, India and Sri Lanka experienced one of their worst natural disasters in recorded history. An earthquake of magnitude 9.0 struck Indonesia off the West Coast of Northern Sumatra followed three hours later by another earthquake 81 km west of Pulo Kunji. These two earthquakes created giant tidal waves, which hit 2260 km of Indian coastline on the Southeast coast and more than 1000 km of Sri Lanka along its North, East and Southern coasts, causing extensive amounts of damage. Estimates suggest that more than 31,000 people were killed in Sri Lanka and 11,000 in India. More than two million people were affected by the tsunami in the two countries, with the number of displaced at approximately 1 million (Fritz Institute, 2005).

The reactions to the tsunami were vastly different in each country. The Indian government declined international assistance for the relief operations, declaring that sufficient resources were available to assist those made vulnerable. After an initial delay, the Sri Lankan government requested international assistance. In both countries, the government, local NGOs, international NGOs already operating within the country, the private sector and religious groups participated in an unprecedented relief effort (Fritz Institute, 2005).

This was the most rapidly and generously funded disaster relief operation in history: US$13.5 billion was pledged or donated internationally for emergency relief and reconstruction, including more than US$5.5 billion from the general public in developed countries. The budgetary constrains normally associated with humanitarian relief did not exist.

According to the *Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami: Synthesis Report*, written by the Tsunami Coalition, the large funding levels and relief response by the international community also produced a number of negative

outcomes. Particularly, because of the need to spend large amounts of money quickly, international NGOs did not always make the best use of local resources.

> "Exceptional international funding provided the opportunity for an exceptional international response. However, the pressure to spend money quickly and visibly worked against making the best use of local and national capacities. TEC studies do not find that many international agencies lived up to their own standards with regard to respect and support for local and national ownership: where local and national capacities were recognised, they were often applied in strengthening international agencies more than local responses. '[L]ocal ownership… was undermined and some local capacities were rendered more vulnerable' (TEC Capacities Report, 2006, p9). Many efforts and capacities of locals and nationals were marginalised by an overwhelming flood of well-funded international agencies (as well as hundreds of private individuals and organisations), which controlled immense resources. (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006; p.18)."

Further, the large amounts of funding also meant that organizations and actors with less experience were becoming involved in the relief effort.

> 'Generous funding not only exceeded the absorption capacity of an overstretched humanitarian industry and deprived it of its customary excuse for built-in systemic shortcomings, but also led to the proliferation of new actors with insufficient experience and therefore competence, as well as to established actors venturing into activities outside their normal area of expertise (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006; p.20).'

It is difficult to assess how much this post-tsunami relief context played a role in the Tsunami project, and specifically on the project's capacity building activities. However, we do know that the Tsunami project was under significant pressure to spend the project's budget within a specific frame of time. This resulted in the need to start the project quickly and to limit the project to a three-year timeline. These time pressures may have played a role in terms of the depth of the Project's capacity building activities. A longer project time-line would have allowed for more planning around the ECB activities and for greater depth of learning.

Conflict in Sri Lanka

In addition to the post-tsunami environment, the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka has had a significant impact on the project activities in the east of the country, including on the monitoring work. The government of Sri Lanka has been involved in an ongoing civil war with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for over two decades. Although the conflict had subsided in the early 2000s, the conflict again escalated following the presidential elections in November 2005. The LTTE began attacks on government security forces with the intention of provoking war. The government initially reacted with restraint, but full-scale fighting began in July 2006 in the East that led to a major

campaign to retake the large areas under LTTE control. After approximately a year of conflict, in which hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced and tens of thousands of homes damaged, destroyed and looted, the government declared the East liberated from the LTTE in July 2007. Fighting then intensified at the end of 2007 as the government attempted to retake areas in the north. Since September, the government has repeatedly stated that it is committed to defeating the Tigers militarily (International Crisis Group, 2008).

In addition to fighting in the north and east, in 2008 there has been the assassinations of a government minister and a Tamil opposition member of parliament, multiple bombings in Colombo, a number of attacks on civilians in the south, and disappearances and killings of civilians in the north and east. More than 5,000 combatants and civilians are estimated to have been killed over the past two years. At least 140,000 have left intensified fighting in the north, and more are likely to be forced out if the military continues its operations (International Crisis Group, 2008).

The increased fighting in Sri Lanka has resulted in difficulties in the project activities in the East, including the monitoring work. The following are some of the main issues that were raised by the Sri Lanka project staff in terms of the monitoring activities:

- **Interacting with the community members in the East of Sri Lanka has been difficult**. Village members in the East are frustrated with the conflict situation, and are thus generally not willing to participate in the project activities, including the monitoring activities. Fear has also been affecting people – the general fear of living in a conflict environment has made people scared to provide information, making it difficult for the Sri Lankan staff to collect monitoring data. Connecting people is very difficult and community mobilization is essentially impossible. Villagers are frustrated with their situation and thus want more action and don't want to spend time in meetings.

- **Movement has been as been restricted because of the conflict**. The project team has had to stay 30-40 kilometres from the project site because of security issues. Movement is generally difficult; there are many vehicle checks and restricted areas. Further, there were recently two elections in the east of Sri Lanka, which has made security even worse and has resulted in a police curfew and less access to the project sites. The project staff can't work independently because of security and the monitoring work often looks suspicious, for example, when monitoring the mangrove forests. Finally, it is not possible for management staff to visit the project sites very often as it takes nine hours and is risky in terms of security.

- **Constant Change.** Because of the conflict, the project context is constantly changing. The project starts working on a particular aspect of the project, but then activities have to change because of changes in the context. Progress has essentially stagnated and villagers are simply not cooperating.

- **Staff turnovers and the resulting low staff capacity.** Because of high staff turnover, overall staff capacity and moral is quite low.

The monitoring activities in the east of Sri Lanka have therefore been quite severely limited as a result of the conflict in that area. One recommendation of this report is that the ECB activities should have incorporated learning objectives on conducting M&E in a conflict environment. Several of the Sri Lankan partners mentioned that this would have been useful. There is a significant amount of literature and practical recommendations for conducting M&E in a conflict setting, and thus it would have proved useful to discuss various options with the Sri Lankan partners.

6.0 Developing Ownership and an Overall Learning-oriented Project Environment

As the monitoring component of the Tsunami project has largely been donor driven there have been challenges in terms of ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners. The "learning by doing" approach, however, and the focus on a learning-oriented monitoring system has helped to develop ownership of the monitoring system among the partners, and in general, foster an overall learning-oriented project environment.

The Tsunami project is co-funded by CIDA and IDRC. CIDA requires that all of its projects, including the Tsunami project, use an LFA for planning, monitoring and evaluation. At the planning stages of the project, the project consultant who designed the initial Tsunami project proposal also developed a results matrix (i.e. an LFA). Following the first "all partners planning meeting," the implementing NGOs then used this initial LFA as a basis to develop a full LFA according to the specific realities of the Sri Lankan and Indian sites, and on what the NGOs, in consultation with community partners, felt that they would realistically be able to achieve. The final version of the LFA was not finalized until December 2007 – half way through a three year project.

IDRC has not required that the Tsunami project use a specific M&E methodology or framework, but has pushed for the partners to develop and use a utilization/learning-oriented monitoring system (see sidebar). A utilization/learning-oriented monitoring system is one in which learning to improve on the program activities takes centre stage. Those who are implementing the project activities are the primary users of the monitoring system and they are the ones who dictate the questions being asked. They then use the information collected from the monitoring system in order to make decisions regarding project activities. With a utilization/learning-oriented monitoring system, therefore, the primary users dictate what information is needed from the monitoring system. The system is designed for their benefit so that they can make better decisions on how the program is being implemented and how activities can be improved.

> "IDRC's approach to evaluation is utilization-focus and does not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, or theory. By promoting appropriate methodology for particular use, the Centre acknowledges that no one methodology suits every situation. Rather the primary intended users of evaluations should select the most appropriate focus, methodology and approach"
>
> (IDRC, 2008; p.4).

IDRC wanted the Tsunami project to develop a monitoring system that would help the implementing partners learn throughout the project and thus improve on the project activities. The adoption of OM, which was agreed to by the partners at the inception stage of the project, partially resulted from IDRC's push for a utilization/learning-oriented monitoring system. That is not to say that IDRC

isn't also interested in ensuring that the partners comply with accountability requirements, but that learning-oriented goals are of equal importance.

There has been good communication between CIDA and IDRC on the monitoring activities, mostly through technical reports. The final LFA had to be approved by CIDA, but there has generally been a relationship of trust. According to IDRC's Research Officer, "they are confident in what we do and we make an effort to keep them posted on the project activities".

The M&E work for the Tsunami project, regardless of being based on a learning-oriented system or a specific methodology, has therefore been driven by the donor agencies – CIDA and IDRC. This has created problems in terms of ownership of the process among the implementing NGOs. The M&E consultant has noted that it is always better if the implementing organizations asks for help rather than the donor agencies directing this help (see sidebar). To some degree, the implementing partners have felt that the monitoring work has been a cumbersome addition to the implementation process. For the partners, it has thus been a matter of juggling between the implementation and monitoring work. One of the IDRC staff involved in the project, in fact, suggested that because of the top down approach – that the LFA is a requirement and was originally developed by a consultant – that some of the partners' management feel that the monitoring work is a necessity rather than a priority. Thus, for at least some of the implementing partners, the "top-down" approach to the monitoring system for the Tsunami project has limited ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners and has resulted in M&E becoming less of a priority.

> *It is always better if the implementing organization asks for help in a certain area rather than the donor agencies directing this help as there is always more uptake and ownership. It has taken time to develop ownership among the NGOs.*
>
> - M&E Consultant (paraphrase)

From the point of view of the donors, however, there are simply some aspects of a project that are non-negotiable – they simply must be done regardless of whether or not the process is driven by the implementing partners or by the donor agencies. M&E is often one of those issues, as M&E is much too important to be pushed aside. Donors face a significant amount of pressure to demonstrate accountability of spending public funds and this translates into pressure on partners to demonstrate results to the funding agencies. Nonetheless, as the Tsunami project has progressed, there have been a number of factors that have helped to increase ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners. There has been an attempt to develop a monitoring system that reflects the implementing partners' organizational values, and the focus on a learning-oriented monitoring system has helped the NGOs to value and recognize the importance of monitoring as a learning tool for program improvement. Whether these have been adequate remains open to debate.

6.1 Developing a system that reflects organizational values

Devolving as much control of the monitoring process as possible to the implementing partners has helped the partners to develop a monitoring system that reflects their organizational values. This has resulted in the partners developing greater ownership of the monitoring system as a whole. As mentioned in the previous section, the donor agencies have required the partners to use an LFA, but were otherwise encouraged to develop a system that reflects their values and that addresses their needs.

Participatory principles of inclusion, being an important philosophical approach for all of the implementing partners, has shaped both the process of developing the monitoring system and also the actual monitoring system itself (see sidebar below). The development of the monitoring system, from constructing the LFA to establishing Progress Markers for OM, has been based on participatory principles. All of the implementing NGOs have been involved in the monitoring workshops and thus have all played a role in developing the monitoring system. Community partners, including villagers, have also been consulted in this process and have been instrumental in developing and testing the qualitative monitoring tools and the OM Progress Markers.

> *"Strengthening Resilience of Tsunami Affected Communities "(SRTAC) can be considered as one flag ship project implementing by Sarvodaya. There is no doubt M & E procedure of that project would reflect our organizational values. As you know SRTAC project has bottom - up participatory monitoring approach. That mean village community/ beneficiaries, village and district level staff as well as head office staff are involved in M & E. Through the implementation of the M & E system, addition to the monitoring by staff; beneficiaries are able to monitor the project output and outcome. That mean M & E system would help to empower the grass root".*
>
> - Sri Lankan project staff (paraphrase)

Participatory principles are also paramount to the actual monitoring system itself. Constructive feedback from village members forms an integral part of the qualitative data collection. The qualitative data collection tools, which require in-depth consultations with village members, include:

- the assessment of the bio-shield;
- the assessment of the quality of the bio-shield management plan;
- the assessment the percentage of women / men / underprivileged groups out of those assisted who feel benefited from VKC/VIC assistance;
- the assessment of the percentage of assisted BPL families / women headed households who have improved their income;
- the assessment of the participation in decision making (of Men, Women and the marginalized community)
- the assessment of the participation in project activity (of Men, Women and the marginalized community);

The adoption of the OM methodology has also helped to develop ownership of the monitoring system. OM has resonated well with the implementing partners. They have found that OM is useful as a tool for structuring dialogue with the communities, for assessing more nuanced variables such as empowerment, as a tool for looking specifically at behavioural changes, and in general, as a tool that has the potential to increase learning in the project. For example, one of the Sri Lankan partners noted that OM is useful when carrying out long-term planning discussions with the communities about what they would like the community to look like three years from now. Others mentioned that the LFA is important, but fails to identify empowerment and that OM has more potential in this area.

This section is not intending to state equivocally that the Tsunami monitoring system completely represents the values of the implementing organizations, but rather that there have been specific measures that have helped to increase this likelihood. The participatory process of developing the monitoring system, the participatory nature of the monitoring system itself, and the use of OM are all examples of ways in which the implementing partners have infused their organizational values in the monitoring process.

6.2 Recognising the importance of using monitoring as a learning tool

Ownership of a process is only possible if that process is valued. Similarly, ownership of the monitoring component of the Tsunami project is only possible if monitoring is valued by the implementing organizations. IDRC's and the M&E consultant's focus on a use/learning-oriented monitoring system, rather than stressing aspects of accountability, has helped to create a learning-oriented project environment that has been valued by the implementing partners.

All too often, evaluation is associated solely with accountability to donor agencies, which can produce negative perceptions. In this case, IDRC has stressed the fact that the monitoring system for the Tsunami project, while having to address certain accountability elements, should primarily focus on learning and improving, both related to the project activities themselves and also organizational practices. The M&E consultant has continually stressed that the monitoring work is intended to improve learning and decision making processes, and highlight organizational capacities that need to be improved, such as gender analysis, community participation and facilitation skills.

This push for a learning-oriented M&E system seems to have been well received by the implementing partners. According to one of the Sri Lankan project staff, the approach of learning from mistakes, the learning focus of the project, has been one of the most important aspects of the Tsunami project. For him, "the system itself has been learning for the implementing partners."

> *The approach of learning from mistakes, the learning focus of the project, has been one of the most important aspects of the Tsunami Project.*
>
> - Sri Lankan project staff

The other partners have also demonstrated that they have valued this focus on learning. For example, one of the Indian partners – PAD – has approached the M&E consultant to have him work with them on another project – demonstrating that they have valued the monitoring process with the Tsunami project. Another Sri Lankan partner has noted that, "for me, personally, there have only been positive outcomes as related to capacity building in M&E of the Tsunami project."

As already discussed above, another example of the partners valuing the learning focus of the Tsunami Project has been their enthusiasm for the OM methodology. Again, the partners chose to incorporate OM largely because it is a learning-oriented monitoring tool. OM is simply not intended to address accountability functions, as the LFA performs this role quite well (see sidebar). A number of the partners have mentioned that they plan to use OM for other projects, suggesting that they value OM's focus on learning.

> "Of the three evaluation mechanisms, RBM and its associated tools are designed primarily for accountability. […] Outcome mapping is designed mainly for planning, and learning from, complex development projects that rely for their success on the changes and actions introduced by many external organizations. The methodology compels users to disaggregate organizational relationships, action and behavioural changes in to discrete, progressive, observable changes (Tyler, 2007; p.5)."

7.0 Minimizing the Trade Offs

Working with local partners to develop and maintain a robust yet manageable monitoring system has presented a number of challenges and trade-offs. The challenges, however, have been mitigated to some degree through ongoing and on-demand M&E technical support, which has been possible because of the inclusion of a specific budget line dedicated to both internal and external M&E. A specific budget line for M&E has therefore been extremely critical to the success of the "learning by doing" approach to ECB.

7.1 Manageability versus robustness

The major trade off with the "learning by doing" approach has been between the manageability and robustness of the monitoring system; essentially, the system has been scaled back (in terms of the amount and quality of the data being collected) in order to make if more manageable for the partners. As discussed above, the "learning by doing" approach requires that all the partners dedicate a significant amount of time to the monitoring and ECB activities. The partners have not only had to spend time implementing the monitoring activities, as normally required for any program or project, but have also had to spend a significant amount of time and project resources on the ECB activities (i.e. the workshops, etc.), and also the extra time that is needed to implement monitoring activities as a result of being novices in this area. It simply takes more time to implement monitoring activities as a beginner than it does for someone who is more experienced.

For the tsunami project, the extra time commitment has resulted in a number of trade offs. The M&E consultant, for example, wrote in one of his workshop reports:

> "What emerged was the team had actually not begun using the system designed in the August workshop. There were not very clear reasons except that the team was busy in implementation tasks and had not taken up monitoring as per the designed system."

Time for the Tsunami project has been very tight; in fact implementation activities were behind from the very beginning of the project. The extra time required by the "learning by doing" approach added to this busy schedule resulting in less time being dedicated to actually implementing core monitoring activities. Thus, the major trade off has been the robustness of the monitoring system, including the quality of the system and the amount monitoring data that has been able to be collected. Examples of this, which have been explored in other sections of this paper, include the fact that LFA had only been finalized and that monitoring only seriously began by the beginning of 2008, which is almost two years in to a three year project. Further, it is unlikely that the partners will have monitored the OM Progress Markers by the end of the project. The partners might have been able to do more if the project had been longer, but three years is a short time-frame

to allow for slower learning processes such as those that have evolved with the development and management of the monitoring system.

As described by the quote below, the implementation of OM was simplified substantially in order to foster the manageability of the system:

> "We [IDRC and M&E consultant] have been monitoring on an ongoing basis in order to provide support as needed. It's just that it's a new area, they feel it's difficult and challenging. However, OM was simplified to address this."
>
> - IDRC staff member

Similarly, the monitoring system as a whole was implemented incrementally in order to ensure the process was manageable for the NGOs:

> "There was a consensus that this approach of scaling up monitoring coverage in a graduated manner may be a better idea and it will also allow the participants to focus on implementing of the project which is at a crucial stage and phasing in the monitoring step by step at a time and pace that will be more comfortable and not very overwhelming (Chaturvedi, 2008)."

Developing a more detailed and purposeful ECB plan at the beginning of the project may have helped to better negotiate this relationship between manageability and robustness. The terms of reference between IDRC and ASK India did clearly outline that the capacity building should lead to the implementing organizations learning and applying systematic monitoring and evaluation based on quantitative and qualitative indicators, including progress markers, and that this should lead to better learning from experience for the organizations. This objective was also articulated with the implementing organizations and each monitoring workshop also had a specific agenda with clearly articulated expected results.

However, linking more detailed learning objectives for the ECB activities (learning objectives based preferably on a prior analysis of the partners' organizational capacity in M&E) to project-based timelines might have helped to ensure that the ECB activities, and thus the monitoring activities, were more directly linked to objectives and timelines related to project improvement. With the "learning by doing" approach, the ECB activities and schedule have been directly linked to completing the monitoring work for the Tsunami project – the partners have needed develop the monitoring system and learn new skills in M&E before they could actually monitor. Thus, the monitoring work for the Tsunami project has been based almost entirely on the schedule of the ECB activities, particularly the monitoring workshops. As the ECB activities are directly linked to the monitoring activities, not having explicit ECB goals, objectives and activities tied to project-based timelines has resulted in monitoring activities that are not linked to project-based timelines and thus project improvement. A more detailed ECB plan, linked directly to project-based goals and timelines, would have helped to ensure that the ECB

objectives and activities were based on the needs for monitoring the Tsunami project and thus focused on project improvement.

> According to King and Volkov (2005),
>
> "The first component of ECB structures is a purposeful ECB plan for the organization. This implies an appropriate conception of and a tailored strategy for evaluation in organizational policies and procedures (aligned with the organization's mission, goals, and strategies); an evaluation oversight group (for example, the evaluation manager and Evaluation Platoon at Neighborhood House); and a formal ECB written document.

Although it may not have been possible to develop as full of an ECB plan as described above (considering time and resource constraints), it could have proved helpful to have all of the project partners agree on a more specific set of objectives for the ECB activities based on specific project-based timelines.

7.2 Having a budget for M&E technical support has been critical for ensuring the quality of the M&E system

The previous section outlined how maintaining a manageable monitoring system has had impact on the robustness of the system. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that the M&E technical support, and having a budget line for M&E activities, have been paramount to ensuring that the monitoring system has maintained a level of quality (see sidebar).

> *Budget lines for both internal and external monitoring and evaluation has been very critical to the capacity building approach.*
>
> IDRC staff (paraphrase)

The total budget for the Tsunami project is CAD $3,715,796 – CIDA's portion is CAD $2,535,796 and IDRC's portion is CAD $1,180,000. Table 7.2 outlines the budget heads related to M&E activities. Six percent of the total budget has been spent on M&E activities.

Table 7.2 M&E Budget Heads

Item	**Amount**	**Percentage of Total Budget (CAD $3,715,796)**[18]
Consultant Travel for M&E	CAD $49,680	1%
Consultant Fee,	CAD $90,000	2%

[18] The total budget for the Tsunami project is CAD $3,715,796 – CIDA's portion is CAD $2,535,797 and IDRC's portion is CAD $1,180,000.

Workshop, Technical Support		
External Evaluation Fee:	CAD $28,350	0.7%
Misc. Consultant fee	CAD $41,170	1%
Travel for External Evaluator	CAD $24,820	0.6%
Total	**CAD $234,020**	**6% of Total Budget**

Specific activities and human resources that have been used to support the M&E activities include: (1) the contract with ASK India to facilitate the monitoring workshops; (2) the three-day OM workshop and follow-up support by one of the facilitators; (3) the technical support provided by IDRC SARO's Evaluation Program Officer; and (4) the continuing support provided by the Tsunami Project Research Officer.

The role that the M&E consultant has played cannot be understated. The M&E consultant has been the driving force behind the development of the monitoring system for the Tsunami project. One of the most important variables on the success of ECB activities is having an evaluation champion that pushes others to be excited and enthusiastic about evaluation (King and Volkov, 2005). The consultant has played the role of the evaluation champion very well, pushing the NGOs when they have needed to be pushed, and providing enthusiastic encouragement throughout the process. He has guided the development of the monitoring system and provided support on practical skills such as facilitation and more general topics such as societal changes and power dynamics. But again, probably most importantly, his encouragement and enthusiasm has resonated throughout the partners, and has helped to keep them motivated and positive about the monitoring work.

8.0 Lessons Learned

This case study provides a rich description of the donor and implementing partners' experiences with the ECB and monitoring activities associated with the Tsunami project. While many lessons learned have been explored within Sections 5-7 of the paper, the following sections seek to summarize the lessons learned from the various aspects of the ECB and monitoring activities.

- *The implementing partners' unique organizational capacities and roles within the Tsunami project has created an opportunity for them to work with and help each other, which has proved to positively complement the formal ECB activities.* The partners have been helping and learning from each other, which has been instrumental for a project that involves partners with different levels of capacities and different capacity needs depending on their role in the Tsunami project.

- *Although there were mechanisms built in the project to share the partners' experiences related to a variety of technical areas, specific mechanisms to share experience in M&E would have also been beneficial.* Although there were monitoring workshops that all the partners attended, it would have been beneficial to dedicate part of a workshop for the partners to share their experiences in monitoring other projects or programs. This type of exchange was done for other aspects of the project and seemed quite beneficial. This type of communication would not only have helped improve the specific monitoring activities of the Tsunami project, but would have also helped IDRC to gain a greater understanding of the partners' experiences with monitoring techniques.

- *As the Evaluation Champion for the Tsunami project, the M&E consultant has been integral for providing motivation, support and encouragement.* According to King and Volkov, "The value of evaluation champions is hard to overestimate. Although leadership is critical, so too are the activities of people who champion the evaluation cause (King and Volkov, 2005; p.13)". There is little doubt that the M&E consultant has played the role of the Evaluation Champion – his vast experience, knowledge and enthusiasm for M&E, and development practice in general, provided a significant boost to the learning-orientation of the Tsunami project.

- *There seems to have been some confusion between project-level capacities and organizational-level capacities.* The objective of the ECB activities for the Tsunami project was to build project-level capacities (i.e. to improve the Tsunami project), not organizational capacities. Strengthening organizational capacities would definitely be viewed as a positive outcome, but was nonetheless not the objective of the ECB activities. A purposeful ECB plan would have helped to target project-level capacities by basing the ECB objectives and activities on the specific needs for monitoring the Tsunami project. For example, a purposeful ECB plan could have helped to recognize how OM could have been introduced to

the monitoring system, and what resources were needed, so that the methodology would have been more useful to monitoring the Tsunami project, thus contributing to project-level capacities.

- *Developing ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners has been a challenge.* However, there have been a number of mechanisms that have helped to strengthen ownership.

  (1) Developing (as much as possible) a system that reflects the implementing partners' organizational values. For example, re-developing the LFA in participatory manner and the use of OM seemed to help develop greater ownership of the monitoring system among the implementing partners. However, whether ownership has been achieved with the Tsunami project is still debatable. The monitoring work for the Tsunami project has been driven by the donor agencies – CIDA requiring the use of the LFA and IDRC pushing for the use of a learning-oriented monitoring system. CIDA's requirement for use of the LFA has no doubt placed restrictions on the partners' control over the monitoring system. The LFA methodology, as with all evaluation methodologies, comes with it a certain set of values, principles and ways of viewing the world. Allowing the partners to choose their own monitoring methodology, which could very well be the LFA, that fits within their organizational and personal philosophies and also that addresses their needs in terms of how they value monitoring work, may have helped to increase ownership of the monitoring system for the Tsunami project.

  (2) IDRC's and the M&E consultant's focus on a learning-oriented monitoring system. The learning-orientation emphasized by IDRC and the M&E consultant towards the monitoring and ECB activities has been well received by the partners, which has helped the partners to value and thus develop ownership over the M&E system.

- *Linking clear ECB goals, objectives and activities to specific project-based timelines may have helped to better manage the relationship between manageability and robustness of the M&E system.* The Tsunami project has had difficulties with timelines in terms of the monitoring work, and this can partially be attributed to the time that has been required for the ECB activities to come to fruition. A purposeful ECB plan, attached to specific project-based timelines, could have helped to outline what was needed to achieve the monitoring goals, how the ECB activities would contribute to this, and from what schedule this would be achieved. A more detailed ECB plan, linked directly to project-based goals and timelines, would have helped to ensure that the ECB objectives and activities were based on the needs for monitoring the Tsunami project and thus focused on project improvement. Flexibility is important and should remain a priority, but nonetheless, developing a purposeful ECB plan would help to establish clear project-based objectives, goals and timelines for the ECB

activities, and as a result, help to ensure a robust, yet manageable monitoring system.

- *Incorporating specific learning objectives on M&E in a conflict environment may have helped the project partners in Sri Lanka to better monitoring the project activities in the east of the country*. There is a significant amount of literature and best practices on conducting M&E in a conflict setting. It would have been useful to include these lessons in the ECB activities.

Appendix #1: Acronyms

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
EU	Evaluation Unit
MSSRF	M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation
Sarvodaya	Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement
PM&E	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OM	Outcome Mapping
LFA	Logic Framework Approach
RBM	Results Based Management
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
P.A.	Practical Action
EU	Evaluation Unit
PAD	People's Action for Development
SPIRIT	Society for Participatory Research and Integrated Training
PPSS	Praja Pragathi Seva Sangam
VKCs	Village Knowledge Centres
VICs	Village Information Centres
PMs	Progress Markers
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
ASK	Association for Stimulating Know How

Appendix #2: Project Timeline

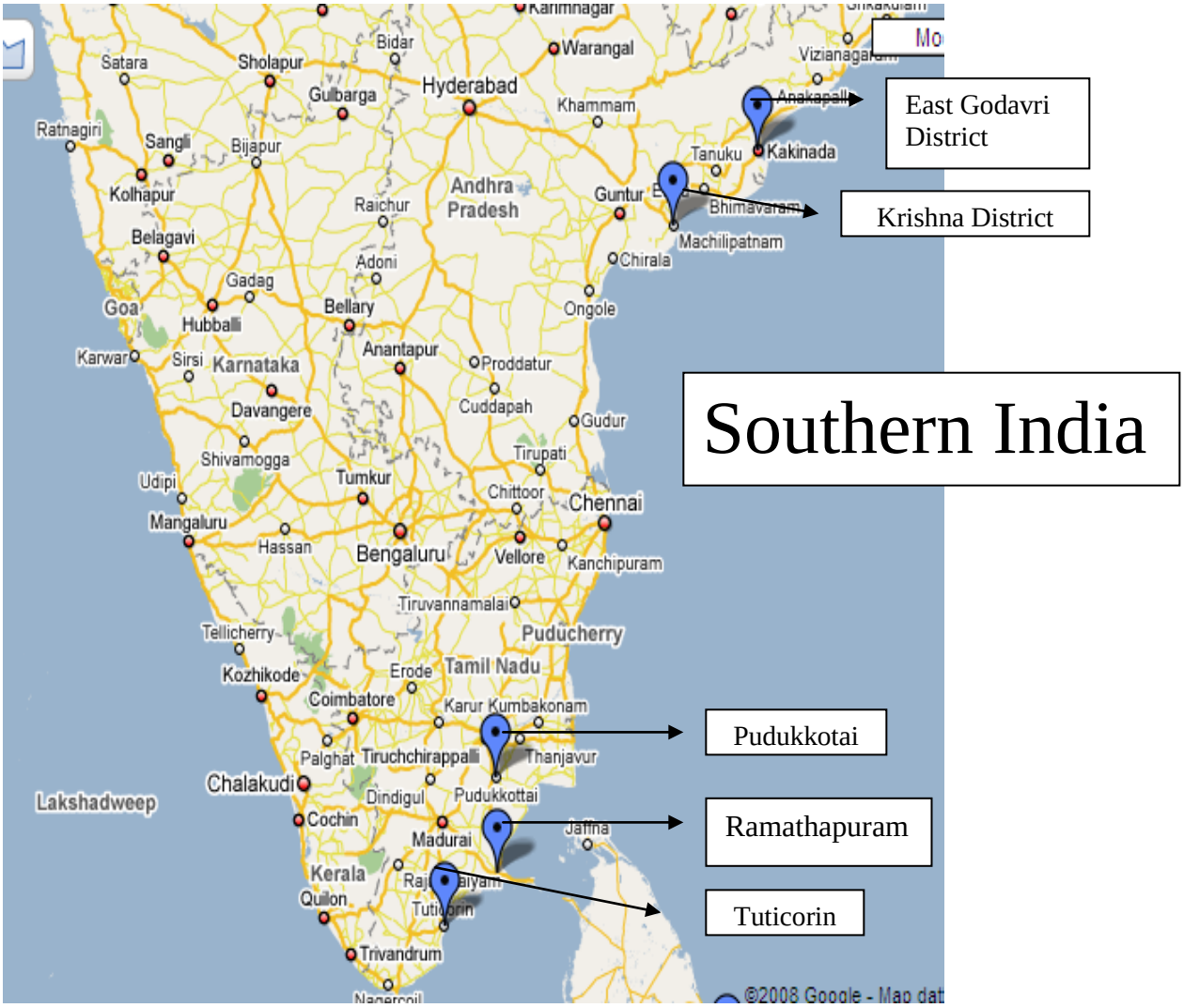
Time	M&E Developments
November 2005	Proposal development meeting in November 2005.
March 2005	A couple of the project team members from both Sarvodaya and MSSRF participated in an Outcome Mapping workshop.
March 31, 2006	CIDA and IDRC ratified a contribution agreement in the amount of CAD $3.7 million for the Tsunami Project.
April 2006	Two sub-agreements between IDRC and the MSSRF and between IDRC and Sarvodaya were finalized in April 2006. Sarvodaya, in turn, signed another memorandum of agreement with Practical Action for the project activities to be undertaken in Sri Lanka.
April 1-2, 2006	A project inception planning meeting was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This meeting enabled the three NGO partners to meet for the first time since the proposal development meeting in November 2005. The meeting enabled the project team to consult with one another on the technical aspect of project implementations, as well as to confirm the expectations and procedural issues regarding the project funding and reporting mechanisms. The meeting also prepared the project partners who needed to reaffirm the activities and expected level of achievements that would need to be realistically reflected in the project's Logical Framework Analysis (LFA).
May 15-17, 2006	At the first project inception planning meeting, it was realized that the geographical diversity, dissimilar cultural context, and varying levels of expertise and experiences among the project partners meant that they needed to carry out an inspection on the feasibility of achieving the desired outcomes, as well as to re-consult with their field-level staff and local community leaders, before a full activity planning could be finalized. As a result, another joint project planning meeting was held on May 15-17, 2006 (also in Colombo).
December 14, 2006	Advisors from both India and Sri Lanka convened for their first introductory project meeting held at the MSSRF, Chennai office on 14th Dec 2006. The one-day session had representation from CIDA India and Sri Lanka, IDRC, Executive Directors from Sarvodaya and Practical Action, Chairman of MSSRF, and their respective project leaders.
5-10 March 2007	IDRC organized a five day OM Workshop in Colombo. The objective of the workshop was to build capacity of the project partners and IDRC project team to understand and use OM concepts in the project. The training had participants from CIDA, IDRC, MSSRF, Sarvodaya and P.A.
13-14 July 2007	IDRC organized a "Project Monitoring and Evaluation workshop" primarily focusing on current status on project data collection, approach and tools by the partners (Monitoring I Workshop).
August 13-15, 2007	The Monitoring II workshop in Sri Lanka, Colombo with Sarvodaya and Practical Action. Apart from establishing clarity on basic terminology related to monitoring and discussing the need for monitoring (to ensure constant learning and adaptation based on clear decision making), the process of designing monitoring system was also discussed. The participants, with the help of the facilitator, also went on to develop a monitoring system that included: • Note on monitoring system and design including what, why, when, how to monitor and who to be involved at various levels and stages including the community participants • Tools and formats for data collection

	• Framework for data compilation, analysis and decision making
August 16-18, 2007	The II Monitoring workshop in India. Apart from establishing clarity on basic terminology related to monitoring and discussing the need for monitoring (to ensure constant learning and adaptation based on clear decision making), the process of designing monitoring system was also discussed. The participants, with the help of the facilitator, also went on to develop a monitoring system that included: • Note on monitoring system and design including what, why, when, how to monitor and who to be involved at various levels and stages including the community participants • Tools and formats for data collection • Framework for data compilation, analysis and decision making
December 11-14, 2007	The III monitoring workshop was organized at Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu from December 11 to 14, 2008.
January 3-8, 2008	The III monitoring workshop was organized at Sarvodaya office from January 3 to 8, 2008.
January 30th, 2008	Second Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting.
April 6-9, 2008	The IV Monitoring workshop organized in Machilipatunm, Andhra Pradesh from April 6-9, 2008.
May 5-9, 2008	The IV Monitoring workshop organized in Colombo, Sri Lanka from May 5-9, 2008.
March 31, 2009	Official end of the project period.

Appendix #3: Location of the Project Sites in the Indian Provinces

Name of the Finalized Project Village Sites

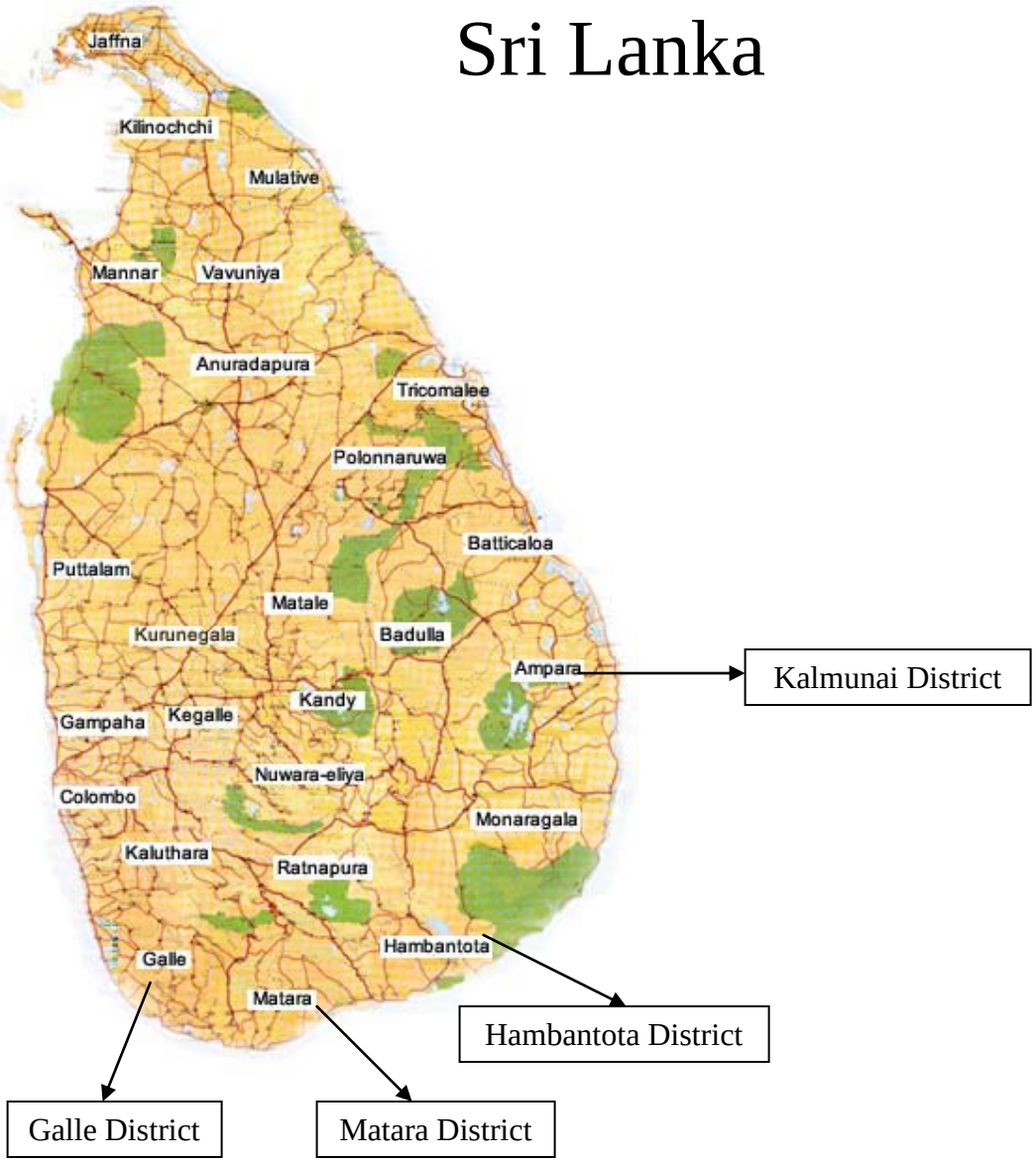
Name of the Province	District	Villages	Implementing Agency
Tamil Nadu	Tuticorin	Vembar, Keezha Vaipar	PAD
	Ramathapuram	Rosemanagar	PAD
	Pudukkotai	Manamelkudi, Seetharamanpattinam, Melasthanam, Kattumavadi, Ponnagaram	SPIRIT
Andhra Pradesh	Krishna District	Machillipattinam, Nali, Sorlagundi	PPSS
	East Godavri District	Kakinada, Danavaipeta Yerrayapeta colony, KMusalayyaPeta Mullapeta SC colony	MSSRF



Appendix #4: Location of the Project Sites in the Sri Lankan Districts

Name of the Districts and Finalized Project Village Sites

Name of the District	Villages	Implementing Agency
Galle	Pathegama, Brahmanawatte & Walhengoda	Sarvodaya
Matara	Thallala South, Bathegama-East, Palana –North	Sarvoday
Hambantota	Medilla, Andaragasaya & Wandirupuwa	Practical Action
Kalmunai	Kalmunai , Mardamunai & Karaitheevu	Practical Action



Appendix #5: Terms of Reference for Project Advisory Committee

Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami Affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka Project Advisory Committee Mandate

The Project Advisory Committee will provide an overall guidance on issues related to strategic management and direction of the project. The membership of the Committee will be agreed upon by all the parties involved in the project (both implementing and funding organizations).

Specifically, the Project Advisory Committee will be mandated to:

1. Conduct periodic review of the activities undertaken by the project teams in India and Sri Lanka, and offer advice and suggestion on how to improve the effectiveness and outcomes of the project
2. Meet periodically to
    - discuss the role of the project in relations to other initiatives where the project could benefit from,
    - offer support to the project teams by systematically endorsing the project accomplishments, and/or providing critical comments on how to improve overall project effectiveness, vision and performance,
    - discuss how the project outputs can be used towards the promotion of social change and policy enhancement in India and Sri Lanka, particularly on issues of social development, as well as natural disaster management, preparedness, and mitigation,
    - discuss and strategically plan opportunities for project promotion and/or dissemination.

<u>Membership</u>

- The Chair/Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer (or alternate) of the each of the implementing institutions: Sarvodaya, M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and Practical Action
- Heads of Mission for CIDA in Sri Lanka and India (or alternate)
- The Regional Director of IDRC Regional Office for South Asia (or alternate) - One senior government official from a relevant department in Sri Lanka, and the State of Tamil Nadu, India
- Senior Officer from the Indian Space Research Organization (To be confirmed) - Chairman or CEO of the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (To be confirmed)

Appendix #6: Progress Markers for Grassroots NGOs

(Please note that this is a draft and not a final version of the Progress Markers)

Expect to See

1. NGOs agreeing to work in remote vulnerable localities and as partners in the project activities of Bio-shield, Village Knowledge Centres, livelihood and community based Disaster preparedness
2. NGOS signing the MOU outlining their roles in implementing the project activities
3. Hiring and sending persons with suitable technical background on community mobilization and organization, bioshield, ICT and livelihood to attend the training.
4. NGOs eliciting direct intervention from MSSRF to help establish the required infrastructure facilities like rent free community building accessible to all and the appropriate land for development of bioshield.
5. NGOs mobilizing and orienting the community on the project concepts by creating awareness through village level meetings, organizing cultural events, taking the community for exposure and exchange visits that helps in gaining confidence of the community and effective implementation and functioning of the activities
6. NGOs facilitate the formation of committees and sub-committees (Are these VLIs ???) which jointly plan and execute the activities.

Like to see NGOs:

1. Carrying out internal reflections on the progress and report as per the terms
2. periodically meet with concerned departments along with MSSRF
3. support the community to in its management of the bio-shield and VKC
4. Liaison with the Forest Department/ other government agencies, mobilizing resources from donors to expand bio-shield programmes
5. use both electronic and print media for disseminating and sharing experiences
6. facilitating the inclusion of women and marginalized in the VLI, management of the bioshield and VRC

Love to See NGOs

1. sustaining the activities in the present area even beyond the project by establishing permanent linkages with the VLIs and providing them technical and financial inputs for the management of the bioshield, VKCs and livelihood programmes
2. Accepting invitations from concerned local government and district and state authorities replicating the activities in new areas
3. NGOs lobbying and advocating with the government for the issues/ rights of the fisher folk/ women and children/ marginalized sections and environment
4. NGOs mobilizing funds to sustain and expand the present project programmes

Appendix #7: Tsunami Project Monitoring Workshops

Workshop Title	Date	Location	Attendance	Objectives
Outcome Mapping Workshop	March 4-9, 2006	Colombo, Sri Lanka	MSSRF, Sarvodaya, P.A. PAD, PPSS, SPIRIT, IDRC, Ask India	Thirty-one trainees from 5 different organizations attended and participated in the workshop along with 3 IDRC Project Staff and 2 OM trainers.
Monitoring Workshop I	July 13-14, 2007	Colombo, Sri Lanka	MSSRF, Sarvodaya, P.A. PAD, PPSS, SPIRIT, IDRC, Ask India	IDRC organized a "Project Monitoring and Evaluation workshop" primarily focusing on current status on project data collection, approach and tools by the partners.
Monitoring Workshop II	• August 16 to 19, 2007 (India); August 13 to 15, 2007 (Sri Lanka)	• Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu (India); • Colombo, Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka)	• MSSRF, SPRIT, PAD, PPSS (India); • Sarvodaya, P.A. (Sri Lanka)	The M&E consultant organized and led a workshop that was used to establish clarity on basic terminology related to monitoring and discussing the need for monitoring, the process of designing a monitoring system was also discussed. The participants, with the help of the facilitator, then went on to develop a monitoring system.
Monitoring Workshop III	• December 11-14, 2007 (India); • January 3 to 8, 2008 (Sri Lanka)	• Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu (India); • Sarvodaya office (Sri Lanka)	• MSSRF, SPRIT, PAD, PPSS (India); • Sarvodaya, P.A. (Sri Lanka)	• Finalization of the Log Frame (Result areas and indicators) based on what is feasible and achievable (to be sent to IDRC which would discuss this with CIDA based on an understanding shown by CIDA to carry out this exercise • The use of Monitoring system designed will have been assessed and refined as necessary • The methods, tools, frequency and persons responsible for measuring the qualitative indicators will have been designed, pre tested and finalized • The methodology for the use of progress markers for monitoring one component of the project will have been pre tested and finalized
Monitoring Workshop IV	• April 7-10, 2008 (India);	• Machilipatinum, Andhra Pradesh	• MSSRF, SPRIT, PAD,	• Not yet available

	• May 10-14?, 2008 (Sri Lanka)	(India); • Sarvodaya office (Sri Lanka)	PPSS (India); • Sarvodaya, P.A. (Sri Lanka)	
Monitoring Workshop V	To be Scheduled			

Appendix #8: List of Documents Reviewed

Title	Author
Proposals and Work Plans	
Joint Final Proposal to IDRC and CIDA – Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities: Coastal Bioshields, Livelihood Development, and Village Knowledge Centres in India and Sri Lanka	Steven Tyler
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-Affected Areas of India and Sri Lanka: Progress Report No. 2	Steven Tyler
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities in Sri Lanka and India: Getting Started on Monitoring and Evaluation Plans; Notes for Partners	Steven Tyler
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka – First Annual Workplan (2006-07)	IDRC
Progress Reports	
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka: Semi-Annual Progress Report (1st October 2006– 31st March 2007)	IDRC
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities: Coastal Bioshields, Livelihood Development, and Village Knowledge Centres in India and Sri Lanka: Annual Progress Report (April 2006 to March 2007)	MSSRF
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities: Coastal Bioshields, Livelihood Development, and Village Knowledge Centres in India and Sri Lanka: Half-yearly Progress Report (April 2007 to September 2007)	MSSRF
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities: Coastal Bioshields, Livelihood Development, and Village Knowledge Centres in India and Sri Lanka: Annual Progress Report (April 2007 to March 2008)	MSSRF
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka: First quarterly Progress report for the Sri Lanka component – From 1st of April -30th of September 2006	Sarvodaya
Strengthening resilience in Tsunami Affected Communities in India and Sri Lanka: Semi-Annual Progress Report (1st April - 30th September 2007)	Sarvodaya
Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami-affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka: Semi-Annual Progress Report (1st /October/2006 – 31st /March/2007)	Sarvodaya
Stregnthening Resilience in Tsunami Affected Communities in Sri Lanka, Semi Annual Report 1st October 2007 to 31st March 2008	Sarvodaya
Workshop Reports	
Report of the visit to Colombo, Sri Lanka To Co-facilitate a Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop For IDRC partners And Make a partial assessment of Monitoring and Evaluation system	Khilesh Chaturvedi (Consultant - ASK)
"Report of the Workshop on developing Monitoring system with and for Sarvodaya and Practical Action, Sri Lanka"	Khilesh Chaturvedi (Consultant - ASK)
"Report of the Workshop on developing Monitoring system with and for MSSRF and associated NGOs (SPRIT, PAD, PPSS)"	Khilesh Chaturvedi (Consultant - ASK)

Consultant's Report: Outcome Mapping Training for the Strengthening Resilience in Tsunami -affected Communities of India and Sri Lanka	Terry Smutylo
Trip Reports	
Monitoring Trip Report	Steven Tyler
Trip Report	Unknown
Trip Report	Katherine Hay
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka
Trip Report	Priyanka and Phet

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Appendix #10: Biography of Case Study Author

Patrick Wray was a Research Intern with IDRC's Evaluation Unit from September 2007 to August 2008. Prior to joining IDRC, Patrick worked in a number of research related roles in both the non-profit and private sectors. He has worked for over two years in the private sector working in evaluation research and he will be working with the Malawi Farmer's Union starting in October 2008.

Patrick's interests include trade and development, regional integration and evaluation methods. Patrick has a Master's degree in International Relations from Carleton University, and a Graduate Certificate in Program Evaluation from the University of Ottawa.